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TITLE: Improving Failure to Return Rates with Men who have Sex with Men-HIV Counseling and Testing in Gay Bars and Sex Parks.

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ISSUE: Recent directives from the Center for Disease Control require grantees to have no less than a 90% return rate for seropositive test results, and no less than 75% for high-risk seronegatives. Agencies that fail to achieve these standards must then document their low return rates and take additional steps to improve the situation. Michigan currently has an average return rate of 71% for its publicly funded HIV counseling and testing sites. Many factors may influence an agencies return rate, including type of site and whether the site offers anonymous or confidential testing.

SETTING: Bars and sex parks frequented by men who have sex with men(MSM).

PROJECT: To address this issue, CARES has developed a program to target the men who have sex with men (MSM) population. The components of this MSM program, "Friends Educating Friends", are as follows: (1) HIV counseling and testing using the oral test **Orasure** in local gay bars and sex park settings; (2) recruitment and training of gay and bisexual men to become peer opinion leaders; (3) street outreach in the gay bars and sex parks by both MSM program staff and trained volunteers.

RESULTS: From January 1, 1998 to December 31, 1998 the "Friends Educating Friends" program counseled and tested 251 MSM. Out of that number, 4 people tested positive, which is well above the national average of 1 reactive person per 250 tests. The MSM program had a 100% return rate for both seropositive and seronegative clients.

LESSONS LEARNED: The experience of the "Friends Educating Friends" program suggests that several factors can have a positive impact on return rates. Our success suggests that by using **Orasure**, testing in places where gay and bisexual men gather, and utilizing peer volunteers to promote HIV testing, we have been able to achieve high return rates.

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